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## THE QUESTION BOX

*The Wisconsin Historical Library has long maintained a bureau of historical information for the benefit of those who care to avail themselves of the service it offers. In "The Question Box" will be printed from time to time such queries, with the answers made to them, as possess sufficient general interest to render their publication worth while.*

### FACTS ABOUT GOVERNOR WILLIAM R. TAYLOR

I have made extensive search for information about Governor Wm. R. Taylor without being able to find anything to speak of. If you can supply me with such information or indicate where it may be found, the favor will be much appreciated.

SOLON J. BUCK  
St. Paul, Minnesota

William R. Taylor was the twelfth governor of the state of Wisconsin. He was known as the "Granger" governor, because he came to office as the candidate of the "Patrons of Husbandry," familiarly known as "Grangers." Colonel Taylor, as he was commonly called, was a native of Connecticut, but his parents were Scotch, and recent arrivals in New England. He had the misfortune to lose his mother three weeks after his birth, an event that occurred July 10, 1820. Taylor's father, a sea captain, was drowned when the boy was but six years old. Thus early orphaned he was brought up by strangers in Jefferson County, New York, then a frontier locality. Young Taylor had a great thirst for knowledge, and after he was sixteen years of age he endeavored to obtain an education; by dint of working summers and teaching winters, he earned enough to begin the sophomore year at Union College, to which class he was admitted, but was unable to complete the course. In 1840 he moved to Elyria, Ohio, and took what would be called today a normal course. He was called to take charge of the worst school in the district of La Porte which was notorious for its rough usage of its teachers. He made it in a short time the banner school of the state. In addition to teaching, Mr. Taylor was employed in

a gristmill, a sawmill, and an iron foundry, and studied medicine about five months in Cleveland. While a citizen of Ohio, he served in the militia, and was successively captain and colonel.

The year that Wisconsin became a state Mr. Taylor removed there and bought a farm in Cottage Grove township of Dane County. He entered upon the work of a farmer with the same enthusiasm and thoroughness he had applied to other industries, and soon had a model farm under his control. He saw that individualism was a disadvantage to farmers and fostered all kinds of associations among them. He served seven years as president of Dane County Agricultural Society. He also held many local offices: in 1853 he was a member of the county board of supervisors and the next year its chairman; he was superintendent of the poor relief for seventeen years; trustee of the State Hospital for the Insane for fourteen years; promoted farmers' institutes; and was the first man in the county to offer a bounty for recruits in the Civil War. As foreshadowing his later services, he introduced a bill into the state senate of 1854, of which he was a member, to equalize taxation, and to tax railway property. This bill was lost.

In 1872 Colonel Taylor was elected president of the State Agricultural Society, and made a number of speeches at fairs that brought him prominently before the public. The Republicans had carried the state at every election since 1856, but in 1873 there was a great deal of restlessness under their tutelage on the part of many elements of the population. It was generally believed that the Republicans were dominated by the two great railway systems of the state, and the people were mulcted illicitly of their rightful dues. A convention was called by the disgruntled faction at Milwaukee in September and formed what was called the Liberal Reform party. This was composed of Democrats, disaffected Republicans or Mugwumps, those opposed to a drastic temperance law (enacted by the preceding legislature), and the Farmers' Alliance, or Patrons of Husbandry (the Grange); of all these forces the latter was the strongest, and a farmer candidate was the natural consequence. Colonel Taylor, the president of the State Agricultural Society, was nominated by acclamation, and at the election defeated Governor Washburn by a large majority. It is due to Mr. Taylor to state

that personally he was a strong temperance man, a member of the Good Templars. It would be writing a history of Wisconsin in the decade of the seventies to detail the events of Taylor's administration. No doubt the so-called Potter Law, fixing railway rates, was its outstanding feature. Such legislation appears to have been in advance of public sentiment. At any rate both the Potter Law and Governor Taylor went to defeat in the gubernatorial campaign of 1875, and the farmer governor retired to his Dane County farm the first of the year 1876. His later life was undistinguished, devoted to his farm and family. In 1905 the infirmities of age made it necessary for him to give up active life on the farm; some unfortunate investments, also, somewhat impoverished him, and he went to live at the Gisholt Home for the Aged in Dane County, and there he died March 17, 1909. He was buried at Madison in the Forest Hill cemetery, by the Knights Templars, of which order he was a member. In 1915 the state legislature appropriated a fund for a monument to Governor Taylor, and a handsome shaft now marks his last resting place.

#### DOUBTS CONCERNING THE EXECUTION OF MARSHAL NEY

MR. R. G. THWAITES,  
MADISON, WIS.

I notice that your name appears in the preface of the book entitled, *Historic Doubts of the Execution of Marshal Ney*, written by James A. Weston.

I shall very greatly appreciate any information you may be able to give me regarding the location of any of the original material used by Mr. Weston.

JAMES R. GARFIELD  
Cleveland, Ohio

Dr. Thwaites died in 1913, and the following answer to the inquiry you address to him has been prepared by one of the workers in the Wisconsin Historical Library.

Many years ago Dr. L. C. Draper, the first secretary of this Society, became interested in the identity of Peter S. Ney, of North Carolina, and made a large collection of manuscripts concerning him. In 1885 and 1886 he had a brief correspondence with Mr. James A. Weston, who said he had been making similar investiga-